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ABSTRACT

This study examined family formation, employment, child-care arrangements, parenting, family activities, and attitudes and values of British parents. Subjects were nearly 6,000 British 33-year-old married parents, originally subjects in the longitudinal National Child Development Study, which traced the lives of all those in Great Britain born in a specific week in 1958. Findings of the current study revealed wide disparities in income levels and time available for family life. Couples in which both spouses were employed full-time tended to be better qualified and have higher status occupations than couples in which both were unemployed. The most egalitarian parenting and domestic arrangements were found in households in which both parents were employed full-time; nevertheless, women retained disproportionate responsibility for child care, child-rearing, and domestic work. Heavy paternal work commitments discouraged equal parenting. The majority of parents appeared highly contented with their marriages and their lives in general. Parents in traditional families were marginally the most satisfied. There was a sizable minority of parents who were not happy with their marriage or their overall lives, and a smaller group who indicated psychological distress. For mothers, the key factor in these outcomes was their partner's contribution to family life and parenting. For fathers, their parenting role had little bearing on their marital happiness, general life satisfaction, or emotional state. There was some evidence that fathers who were playing an equal part in child care were the least content. (KB)

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